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ABSTRACT

This presentation addresses ways to meet the needs of African-American gifted students and offers suggestions for inclusive classroom interventions that are liberating for students who exist simultaneously in African American culture, American mainstream culture, and as gifted and talented learners. The identification of these learners must begin with an examination of the belief system embraced by stakeholders and a nominating and screening process that is broad and deep, extending into African American communities, businesses, churches, and professional organizations. A holistic paradigm to guide appropriate programming should be reflective of and complementary to African American culture, multicultural and global in perspective, cognitively and creatively challenging, active and interactional, reflective of formative and summative evaluation efforts, and empowering. Tables list cognitive strengths/preferred learning modes of African-American gifted learners and implications for construction of appropriate learning experiences, psychosocial needs of young gifted African Americans and suggested programmatic responses, traditional and empowering staff development practices, and traditional and empowering approaches to family involvement. (Contains 14 references.) (JDD)

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African American Students with Gifts and Talents in an Inclusive Classroom

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While the concept of inclusion has been variously defined, one could describe the term as a "movement of parents, educators, and community members that seeks to create schools and other social institutions that are based on acceptance, belonging, and community (Salend, 1994, p. 49). Research by Cox, Daniels, Boston, 1985, indicates that a large majority of gifted students across the nation spend all but two to three hours per week in regular classrooms. Inclusionary schools and classrooms are designed to affirm and empower students in ways such that their cultural, social, academic, and, yes, holistic needs are recognized and met. Such represents the challenges facing the inclusion of gifted and talented African American learners in this nations's schools. These learners' individual and collective needs, that emanate from their unique racial and cultural legacy and current realities, must be addressed by inclusionary schools and classrooms. In a sense, the challenge of schools is to recognize and respond to the "threeness" of African American gifted students. These students exist at the same time as African Americans in African American culture, African Americans in American mainstream culture, and African American as exceptionally gifted and talented learners. In the case of gifted and talened learners, the normal "two warring souls" challenges of most African Americans is replaced by the challenges of meeting the "three warring souls" of gifted African American learners. Unfortunately, however, some recent research (Archambault, et.al., 1993) reveals that only minor modifications are made in regular classrooms to meet the needs of gifted students, that these regular classrooms do not challenge gifted learners, and that little curriculum differentiation takes place. This presentation addresses ways to address the needs of these learners and offers suggestions for interventions in inclusive classrooms that are truly liberating and meet the "three warring souls" of these learners.

This society and its educational systems must respond to a loud and clear call for positive and progressive change in the education of young, gifted African American learners. A cursory review of the research and literature in the field of "gifted" education will reveal a voluminous collection of research articles, books, and manuscripts that contain a plethora of theory, speculation, and basic and applied research results related to the education of "gifted" learners. With a few exceptions, however, it has only been recently that the unique needs and concerns of young (ages 4-14), gifted African Americans have been addressed seriously by those writing about exceptionally gifted and talented people (Fraisier, 1979; Hilliard, 1976; Jenkins, 1936; Renzulli, 1973; Torrance, 1969). Most of this limited culturally

focused research and practice, however, has been centered primarily on assessment and identification issues. Only a paucity of this literature has focused on understanding philosophical and conceptual issues related to the race, culture, and ethos of African American gifted children and youth. The shift in thinking in the field of gifted education towards program development and life enhancement for these learners, in my view, has been hampered and internalized by a belief system held by many in the field of gifted education. In too many instances, policies and practices in gifted education appear to manifest a belief system that suggest that young, African American learners do not possess the necessary abilities, aptitudes, or personality characteristics usually ascribed to the gifted label. These cultural deficit merchants believe that the disproportionaltely small percentage of giftedness identified in African American populations (Zappia, 1989) is a result of the limited capacity of these learners to express behaviors associated with giftedness. It is just not there, they believe.

Still other contemporary researchers. thinkers and writers of the gifted experience generally plead with their readers to accept the hypothesis that these learners (i.e., young, gifted African Americans) exist and can be found if one would only use this particular procedure, this particular test, these particular test items, and the like. Notwithstanding a few exceptions, most of this assessment and measurement theory evolves from a paradigm that esteems cognitive traits of upper and middle-income European Americans (Ford, Winborne, & Harris, 1991; Gould, 1981; Hilliard, 1976; Patton, 1992) while, at the same time, eschews and denigrates manifestations of giftedness expressed in various African American Cultural contexts. So, what are some better ways of identifying and nurturing these learners' gifts and talents?

Finding Them: Towards a Holistic Model

It has been suggested that efforts aimed at identifying and serving the needs of young, highly gifted and talented African Americans would be enhanced if identification were conducted within the context of a comprehensive and dynamic giftedness construct that includes the components of 1) assessment and identification, 2) authentic and comprehensive curriculum and instruction based on results from assessment, 3) professional development and empowerment, and 4) parent and extended family empowerment (Ford & Harris, 1991; Frasier, 1991; Kitano, 1991; Patton, 1992).

Any search for identifying these learners must begin with an examination of the belief system embraced by all stakeholders in the search. The belief systems of teachers, administrators, parents, and the learners, themselves, must be analyzed and shaped in ways that expect and assume that these learners exist and their gifts and talents identified. A nominating and screening process that is broad and deep should follow the establishment of such a belief system, and, by necessity, must extend beyond the schools and into the appropriate African American communities, businesses, churches, and professional organizations. This stage should be followed by an identification process that demystifies current practices and processes and expands upon conventional ritual. Once identified these learners' needs must be nurtured.

A new paradigm is needed to guide appropriate and effective programming for these learners once identified. It is suggested that such a holistic paradigm include programmatic efforts based on certain principles and containing certain features. It is important that such a model be 1) reflective of and complementary to African American culture, 2) multicultural and global in perspective, 3) cognitively and creatively challenging, 4) active and interactional, 5) reflective of formative and summative evaluation efforts, and 6) power enhancing. Tables 1, 2, and 3 provide suggestions for constructing culturally specific experiences for young African American learners. Such education, however, must be connected to traditional and contemporary educational support practices valued by the families and communities of these learners.

Developing a value system and practices that build upon the strengths of the families of these gifted learners will require a new definition of "family". One need only study the contributions of African American scientists, inventors, scholars, artists, civic leaders and the like to realize that this phenomenon of giftedness among African Americans is not new. Therefore, one can presume that African American gifted learners have a background and orientation with a family comprised of bright, creative, intuitive and rationally superior parents, grandparents, friends, siblings, and other ancestors. Suggested at this point, therefore, is a new discourse and interaction pattern with these families that begins with valuing and respecting their gifts, and their intelligences, and desire to be involved with their gifted children's educational program and builds upon these understandings.

Table 4 provides suggestions for enhancing family involvement by utilizing approaches that will empower and liberate the families of African American gifted learners. Utilizing the suggestions advanced in Table 4 will result in improved relationships between the African American community at large and the educational system. Opening the doors of schools so that their services are extended into communities, while increasing the understanding that school personnel have of the diverse strengths, resources, and needs of the African American community, will result in more successful outcomes for all.

TABLE 1

Cognitive Strengths / Preferred Learning Modes of African-American Gifted Learners and Related Implications for Construction of Appropriate Learning Experiences

Cognitive, Psychomotor and Creative Strengths AND Preferred Modes of Learning	Effective Teaching/Learning Methodologies to enhance and positively develop strengths and complement preferred modes of learning
S Verbal fluency, stylistic, charismatic language use.	Language arts emphasis literature, reading, oral discussion, debates, public speaking, poetry reciting, drama.
S Advanced kinesthetic ability PM Verve, physical movement.	Emphasis on use of technology, experimentation with puzzles, manipulatives; allow frequent movement in class organization, utilizing hands on learning.
S Creative, resourceful, advanced aesthetic sensibilities, inventive.	Emphasis on integrating the arts with core content instruction; utilizing problem-based learning; opportunities for developing new solutions to old problems, synthesizing.
PM Interest/concern for human-kind; prefers for person-to-person interaction/contact (over-person-to-object interaction).	Emphasis on development of social interaction skills; leadership development opportunities; anthropology; world affairs; utilizing cooperative learning as an instructional strategy.
PM Belief/interest/value for the relationship of human beings with Nature.	Focus on science; ecology; outdoor field experiences; study of other cultures with similar values (i.e., Native American, Asian American).

Adapted from the work of Baytops, Sims & Patton, 1993; Hale-Benson, 1986; Hilliard, 1976; Shade, 1990; Torrance, 1977

TABLE 2

Psycho-Social Power Enhancing Needs of Young, Gifted African Americans and Suggested Programmatic Responses

Power Enhancing Needs	Suggested Programmatic Responses
To Develop A Sense Of Competence, Self and Group Identity, and Cross Cultural Competence	Construct and infuse the total curriculum with experiences that help the learner internalize a "sense of self competence", strong self and collective knowledge, consciousness, and identity, and cross cultural competence. Programs and activities should focus on developing a sense of efficacy, confidence, and personal mastery. Schools should establish or connect with existing African American male and female rites of passage programs within the community. Inculate within these learners a deep knowledge of African and African American history and culture.
To Counteract the Effects Of Isolation, Alienation, and Powerlessness	Develop a keen sense of love of self and others; develop prosocial, cooperative interaction skills. Develop programs and experiences that assist these learners to deal with anger and frustration through self-control techniques and non-violent conflict resolution techniques. Develop a deep understanding of and ability to actualize the concepts of power, authority, control, leadership and followership. Offer experiences that allow African American learners to "connect with" each other to learn, share, bond and to further develop the "power" within their selves and their communities.
To Counteract The Effects Of Racism and Oppression	Process real and/or create simulation experiences that help these learners become aware of the origins, perpetuation, and psychology of racism and oppression. Their feelings related to these forces must be processed and problem solving strategies to cope with and mitigate the effects of racism and oppression should be developed.
To Develop a Sense of Self-Actualization and Super-Ego Development	Construct programs that include activities that focus on moral development, self-perception, and self-evaluation. Offer opportunities for these learners to understand, process and deal with the various "forms of overexcitabilities" (Dabrowski, 1972 and Piechowski, 1986) they may experience in day-to-day interactions or specific situations.

NOTE: Some information contained in the Isolation, Alienation, and Powerlessness Section of this table is drawn from the conceptual work of Wilson (1992).

TABLE 3

STAFF DEVELOPMENT VARIABLES

Away From Traditional Practices	Toward Liberating Empowering Practices
That provide specific training for select group of teachers of the gifted only.	That provide training to regular classroom teachers, counselors, administrators, specialists and other support staff.
That provide for development of individual teacher proficiency to work with gifted learners.	That develop collaborative teaming skills of all professionals who impact lives of the gifted (Counselors, teachers, administrators, and support staff).
That allow teachers to utilize extant curriculum modules identified as appropriate for teaching the gifted designed by external experts.	That train teachers to become developers of innovative curriculum appropriate to meet the needs of a more diverse population of students.
Recruitment of primarily Euro-American teachers to enroll in pre-service training programs relative to : the education of the Gifted.	That broaden the recruitment pool to include African Americans in liberal arts programs to encourage their interest as educators of our gifted African Americans.
That support a narrow unidimensional view of giftedness.	That acknowledge and value a multi-dimensional view of the manifestations of giftedness as expressed by African American gifted.
That provide training of staff to involve parents of the gifted in a limited advisory capacity.	That provide training of staff to involve African American parents, extended family members and community as partners in roles of nurturer, supporter, and advocates for gifted learners.
That provide training focused on deficit views of traits of African American learners (e.g., use of terms such as culturally disadvantaged, deprived, at risk, underprivileged and so on).	That focus on inherent strengths of African American learners regardless of socio-economic backgrounds (accentuating the positive).
Limited training provided concerning the impact of culture on learning / teaching styles, and preferences.	That provide research based training relative to the impact of race, and culture on learning styles, preferences, and strengths of African Americans.
Training provided only to teachers related to meeting the intellectual needs of gifted.	That provide training to include counselors, social workers, and administrators concerning the cognitive,affective, and psychosocial needs of all gifted learners.

TABLE 4

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT VARIABLES

TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO PARENT EDUCATION	EMPOWERING, LIBERATING APPROACH
Initial contact with parents is primarily to obtain permission to test.	Initial contact with family and community leaders should be at level of referral to obtain data for referral and description of gifted behaviors are expressed in home and/or community.
Letter provided notifying parent(s) of eligibility to participate in program.	Would be to share results of assessment with family members, and clarify the meaning of test results and their implications for their child's future.
Parent sessions are held to provide information about program offerings, and to solicit support for advocacy with policy makers.	Family sessions are held that would: 1. Provide training regarding characteristics of giftedness and concomitant behaviors to expect in home and school. 2. Provide information regarding socio-emotional needs of gifted African American learners, how families can help to counteract negative pressures, effectively plan for future, etc. 3. Train African American families to develop advocacy skills and understand the educational policy making process. 4. Solicit input and share expertise relative to program offerings.
Individual education plan developed that focuses only on the academic needs of learners.	Individual family plan developed to document learner and family strengths, resources, areas needing enhancement and support needs of family (psycho-social, economic, educational, and the like).
Parent education services provided only to <u>parents</u> of gifted learners.	Services provided to parents, extended family members, church, community leaders, agency personnel using a collaborative support model to enhance services for African American gifted learners.

Note: Table adapted from work of Damiani and Baytops, 1993 and Baytops, in press.

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